

# Sandwich Tern *Thalasseus sandvicensis* and Royal Tern *T. maximus* on Bioko, Equatorial Guinea

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**La Sterne caugek *Thalasseus sandvicensis* et la Sterne royale *T. maximus* sur l'île de Bioko, Guinée Équatoriale.** Plusieurs Sternes caugek *Thalasseus sandvicensis* et Sternes royales *T. maximus* en plumage internuptial ont été observées les 10–11 décembre 2010 à Sipopo, sur la côte du nord-est de Bioko. Il s'agit de la première observation de *T. sandvicensis* et de la deuxième de *T. maximus* pour l'île.

The avifauna of Equatorial Guinea is amongst the least known in Africa (Pérez del Val 2001). The country comprises two islands in the Gulf of Guinea, Bioko (formerly Fernando Po) and Annobón (known also as Pagalu), and a continental region (Río Muni) covering 26,000 km<sup>2</sup>. Perhaps because of the concentration of endemic and restricted-range taxa on the island's mountains, our knowledge of the avifauna of Bioko is mainly focused on forest birds, with much less information available for seabirds (Wells 1968, Pérez del Val *et al.* 1994).

During a short visit to Bioko, I observed several Sandwich Terns *Thalasseus sandvicensis* and Royal Terns *T. maximus* in non-breeding plumage (Figs. 1–2) along the north-east coast at Sipopo,

near the small islet of Horacio (03°45'30"N 08°54'30"E) on 10–11 December 2010. It was difficult to count the precise number of birds, but I estimated 10–30 individuals of each species.

Sandwich Tern is a Palearctic migrant that winters on coasts from north-west Africa south to the Cape of Good Hope (Harrison 1985). Royal Tern is a large maritime tern with a principally tropical distribution and two recognised subspecies, one of which, *T. m. albididorsalis*, breeds on coasts of West Africa, at the Banc d'Arguin (Mauritania), in Senegal and The Gambia (Harrison 1985, Borrow & Demey 2008). The non-breeding range stretches from Morocco and the western Mediterranean to Angola (Harrison 1985, Hockey *et al.* 2005).



**Figure 1.** Adult Sandwich Tern *Thalasseus sandvicensis* in non-breeding plumage, Bioko, Equatorial Guinea, December 2010 (Carlo Costantini)

Sterne caugek *Thalasseus sandvicensis* adulte en plumage internuptial, Bioko, Guinée Équatoriale, décembre 2010 (Carlo Costantini)



**Figure 2.** Adult Royal Tern *Thalasseus maximus* in non-breeding plumage, Bioko, Equatorial Guinea, December 2010 (Carlo Costantini)

Sterne royale *Thalasseus maximus* adulte en plumage internuptial, Bioko, Guinée Équatoriale, décembre 2010 (Carlo Costantini)

Despite being regular and common to very common non-breeding visitors to the Gulf of Guinea coast (Grimes 1987, Elgood *et al.* 1994), and the Rio del Rey estuary in Cameroon (Thomas 1995, Green 1996), just c.100 km distant, this is the first record of *T. sandvicensis* for Bioko and only the second record of *T. maximus*. The first record of the latter species was by Pérez del Val *et al.* (1997) who observed up to 50 off Malabo between 20 November and 18 December 1994. Neither species is included in the January 2010 update of the African Bird Club online checklist of Bioko. *T. maximus*, however, appears in other checklists respectively as a non-breeding visitor or vagrant / occasional visitor (Pérez del Val 1996, Larison *et al.* 1999, Gulf of Guinea Conservation Group, [www.ggcg.st/birds/bioko\\_birdsl\\_intro.htm](http://www.ggcg.st/birds/bioko_birdsl_intro.htm), last accessed on 2 February 2011). Presence on other Gulf of Guinea islands is also irregular. There is an unconfirmed observation of four Royal Terns between São Tomé and Príncipe in March 1992, but the species has never been recorded on Annobón (Jones & Tye 2006). Sandwich Tern, on the other hand, is a regular visitor to São Tomé alone (Jones & Tye 2006).

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